



## Why have children died in vehicles with air bags?

In almost all cases in which an infant died, the baby was riding in a rear-facing safety seat in the front passenger seat. The back of the safety seat was so close to the dashboard that the air bag hit the safety seat with tremendous force. The force broke the back of the safety seat and caused a fatal brain injury. Child safety seats are **not** designed to protect against this extreme impact.

In almost all cases in which a child over age 1 has died from impact by the air bag, he or she was "out of position" – either unbuckled, or not wearing the shoulder portion of the safety belt. The child slid or flexed forward during pre-crash braking, so the head and neck were close to the dashboard at the time the air bag was triggered. Severe head or neck injuries occurred.

If a child is sitting against the seat back, fully restrained by a forward-facing child safety seat or a lap/shoulder belt **and** the seat is pushed all the way back, the danger from the air bag is reduced.

### How do you know if your vehicle has a passenger air bag?

Here are some signs:

- Compartment cover in dashboard panel with embossed letters: *SRS*, *SIR*, or *SRS/Air Bag*.

Beware: **NOT** all vehicles have these marks. **NOT** all vehicles have a cover that shows in the dashboard.

- Warning label on sun visor (often on the back of the visor) and/or on the front of the right door frame.
- Description in the owner's manual.

### What about sports cars and pickup trucks?

If there is no rear seat and no air bag shut-off switch, a child is at high risk from a passenger air bag.

Some pickup trucks made since model year 1996 have switches to shut off the passenger air bag. Other vehicles may have them in future years. Turning off the switch is the best way to protect an infant riding in a rear-facing safety seat or an older child using a safety seat, booster, or safety belt.

### What if you have no alternative except putting a child in front?

If there is no room in back, a child **over age one** may have to ride in the front seat. Here's how to reduce the risk:

- Make sure the child is correctly buckled up with the vehicle seat moved as far back as possible. A toddler/preschooler should use a forward-facing child safety seat; an older child should use a belt-positioning booster or lap/shoulder belt.
- Fasten the harness or lap/shoulder belt securely.
- Make sure an older child does not slip out of the shoulder belt or lean toward the dashboard.

Vehicle owners and lessees can obtain an on-off switch for one or both of their air bags only if they can certify that they are, or a user of their vehicle is, in one of the four risk groups: infants in rear-facing infant seats, drivers or passengers with unusual medical or physical conditions, children ages 1 to 12, or drivers who cannot get back 10 inches from the air bag cover. To be considered eligible for an on-off switch, a NHTSA request form must be filled out and returned to NHTSA. Forms are available from state motor vehicle offices and may be available from automobile dealerships and repair facilities. Forms can also be requested by contacting NHTSA's Auto Safety Hotline at 1-888-DASH-2-DOT or visiting the NHTSA Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>.

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